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Preserving Kentucky's Civil War Legacy



The restored Bottom House on the Perryville battlefield.

Kentucky's Civil War experience was complicated, and preservation of its Civil War sites is a daunting task. From Kentucky's eastern mountains to the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, battlefields and fortifications attest to the military struggle for control of the crucial border state early in the war. The sites of supply, recruitment, and training facilities built by the Union army to support military operations south of Kentucky reflect Federal dominance in the state after 1862. Many of these battlefields and military sites are threatened by modern development or neglect.

Fortunately for the Commonwealth, private citizens have taken preservation of Kentucky's Civil War heritage to heart and have formed "friends groups." The Kentucky Heritage Council (KHC) has seen unknown or ignored sites become model preservation projects through the work of local friends. These grassroots, self-motivated groups have succeeded in their preservation efforts through mutual support, organization, leadership, long hours, and hard work.

Friends groups across Kentucky have assumed diverse roles. They have raised funds to match grants, served as liaisons between the sites and local governments, and been conduits for grant funding. Each organization is as unique as its historic site and its community. This is why friends groups are essential to the success of any battlefield or historic site preservation effort. They understand and can navigate through their own unique political landscape. They know when to approach local government for a matching grant and how to sell battlefield preservation to local business leaders, politicians, and neighbors.

There are several very successful battlefield friends groups in Kentucky. Perryville and Mill Springs—both ranked among the 50 most significant and endangered battlefields in the country by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission in 1993—have outstanding friends groups. The Perryville Battlefield Preservation Association (PBPA) and the Mill Springs Battlefield Association (MSBA), though similar in nature, approach preservation from different perspectives. This is due in part to the fact that much of the

Perryville battlefield is a state park and the Mill Springs battlefield is entirely in private ownership.

Perryville: Small Town Sophistication

The Battle of Perryville was the largest military action within the borders of Kentucky. The clash of two mighty armies left 8,000 men dead, captured, or wounded. Perryville, a village of 300 people in 1862, found itself inundated with thousands of wounded men. Local homes, churches, and stores became makeshift hospitals. The graffiti left on the walls of houses by the convalescing soldiers offers an eerie and grim reminder of the horrors of war. These fragile remains, along with the battlefield itself, are part of the legacy that the PBPA is working to save.

The PBPA was founded as a 501(c)(3), a non-profit tax-exempt corporation* in 1990 to promote the preservation, interpretation, and maintenance of the Perryville battlefield. Originally, the organization sought to provide funding or financial assistance to aid the state park in acquiring land for preservation and markers or other objects for interpretation of the battlefield. The PBPA also wished to prepare and disseminate educational materials related to the Battle of Perryville.

Early on PBPA purchased three replica cannons that were placed in the park to mark Parson's Ridge, the site of a Union artillery battery. A private donation from descendants of a Confederate infantryman allowed the PBPA to erect split rail fencing along the perimeter of the park. These two additions greatly improved the park's appearance and created a more authentic interpretative environment. These improvements were the sort of project-specific, incremental changes that the 25-member PBPA hoped it could accomplish. All of that changed in the summer of 1992.

In June 1992, the Kentucky Department of Parks received \$2.5 million in Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) enhancement funds to acquire historic battlefield land, purchase property in town, and create an interpretive plan at Perryville. Since such funds were contingent on an 80/20 match, the PBPA was charged with raising the needed \$600,000. The PBPA developed partnerships with numerous groups to

raise the money. Contributions from the Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, The Conservation Fund, The Civil War Trust, the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, and state funds raised through a bond issue surpassed the needed ISTEA match.

The constraints of the ISTEA process called for some creative thinking to enable the state parks system to acquire the battlefield lands. To expedite this process, the PBPA entered into an agreement with the agencies involved (Kentucky's Department of Parks, Department of Transportation, the Tourism Cabinet, and the KHC) to undertake negotiations with landowners and to purchase property to add to the state park. This role led to the creation of the Perryville Enhancement Project, a public-private partnership designed to preserve and protect the battlefield and tie the economic development of the town to the project's success. The Project serves the PBPA, the Perryville Battlefield Commission (an organization created by an executive order of the governor to oversee any action taken at the battlefield), and Chaplin Hills Historic Properties, Inc., a private realty company sympathetic to preservation in Perryville and Boyle County.

One of the PBPA's most important roles is as broker. Because the Perryville Battlefield State Historic Site is owned and operated by a state agency, it cannot accept donations for specific purposes. However, the PBPA can and does accept funding for land acquisition, capital improvements, educational programs, battlefield tours, and other projects. Its current focus, however, is purchasing land. With the influx of ISTEA funding, the PBPA assumed the role of local contact between the landowners and the funding agencies. For instance, the PBPA orchestrated an agreement with two local banks to provide 100% financing at

property closings to facilitate smooth property transfers for landowners.

Education has always been a goal of the PBPA. To that end, the PBPA works with the Kentucky Governor's Scholars Program at nearby Centre College. The program brings Kentucky high school juniors to Perryville to participate in the work being done in town and at the battlefield. This association has brought increased publicity to preservation efforts in Perryville. The participants, Kentucky's brightest young people, study the battle and the role the town played in it, and contribute to the battlefield's interpretation and preservation. Other PBPA educational initiatives include internships for college students, archeological digs for local schoolchildren, and making primary research materials available for scholars of the town and the battle.

After six years, the PBPA continues to help people become involved in the preservation of Perryville and its rich military, civilian, and cultural history. "The role of the PBPA will continue long after ISTEA funds are gone. The battlefield will always need the public and private links that define partnerships for battlefield preservation," says Perryville Enhancement Project Director Mary C. Breeding.

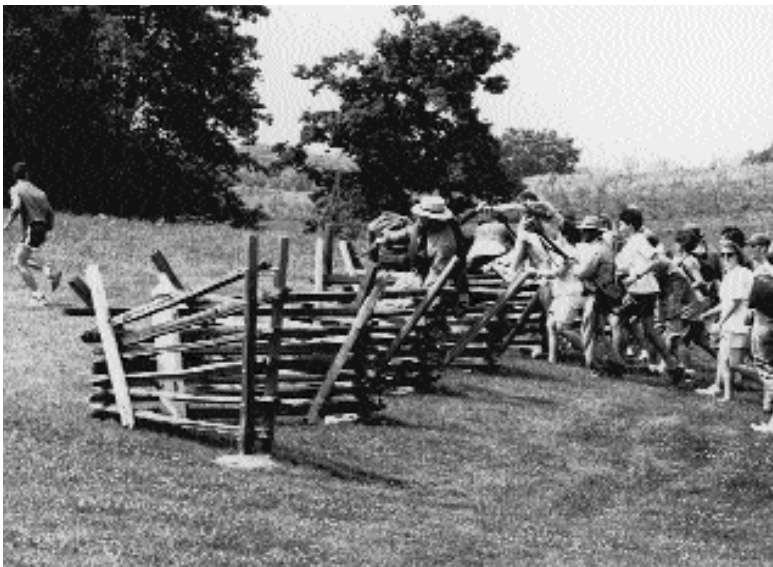
Mill Springs: Starting from Scratch

The Battle of Mill Springs, fought on the cold, rainy morning of January 19, 1862, ended Confederate hopes of holding eastern Kentucky. The Confederate commander, Brig. Gen. Felix Zollicoffer, lay dead on the field—his army demoralized and in full retreat. The battle dealt a serious blow to the Confederacy's hopes for military dominance in the West.

The Mill Springs Battlefield Association (MSBA) was founded in 1992 to protect the site of the battle. The MSBA is also a 501(c)(3) organization. It has grown from a core group of a dozen people to an organization with more than 250 members. Bill Neikirk has served as president of the MSBA since the beginning. He has proved to be a capable leader with the drive and vision to guide the organization and keep it focused. In 1992, only the one acre of the battlefield had any sort of protection. Today more than 60 acres are protected, and the face of the landscape just outside Nancy, Kentucky, has changed considerably.

The change has not been the kind that comes from development or other urban, suburban, and industrial encroachments, although these threats exist. Rather, the agricultural fields that dominate the area have slowly begun to resemble a Civil War battlefield park. The MSBA has been slowly and quietly preserving, interpreting, and landscaping the battlefield. In 1994, with financial assistance from The Civil War Trust, MSBA pur-

Governor's Scholars assault a Union position at Perryville. Photo courtesy KHC.





A lone chimney marks the site of Brig. Gen. Felix Zollicoffer's headquarters at Beech Grove, a tour stop on the Mill Springs battlefield driving tour.

chased 19 acres of battlefield land. The MSBA owns the land and the KHC holds a conservation easement on the property ensuring its perpetual protection.

The MSBA has been very successful and creative with grant funds. It used a small grant from the KHC to create a rudimentary driving tour of the battlefield. The group also used funds from the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) to develop preservation, management, and interpretive plans for the battlefield and conduct an archeo-

logical survey of the site. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) awarded the MSBA \$20,000 to develop an architectural design for a museum/visitors center.

The ARC funding resulted in perhaps the most creative and innovative project to date, an international architectural competition. Advertised in *Competitions* magazine, more than 75 architects from the United States, Canada, France, and New Zealand participated. A jury consisting of an architect, an artist, a writer, a historical archeologist, and two members of the MSBA evaluated proposals from 20 finalists. The grant funding was used as prize money. Victoria Beach and Robert Linn of Cambridge, Massachusetts, submitted the winning design. The visitor center will be constructed on a site near the battlefield as funding becomes available.

The MSBA's fund raising efforts are comprehensive and ongoing, thanks to the group's full-time administrator. "My job is to continue the process of researching the battle, add more land to the park, and provide the visitor with an enjoyable and informative experience," remarks MSBA staff person Ron Nicholas. Nicholas takes his job seriously, and the changes made during his tenure are clearly visible. A split rail fence surrounds Zollicoffer Park, a

one-acre county park dedicated to the site of Brig. Gen. Zollicoffer's death and a Confederate mass grave. Interpretive and directional signs mark and enhance the driving tour. The MSBA funded Nicholas' position for the first three years with funds from the ABPP, the KHC, and county government sources. Next year the funding will be entirely local. The success of this self-sustaining staff position parallels the success of the MSBA. Since 1992, the MSBA has raised \$1 million to protect battlefield land.

Mill Springs and Perryville are the state's two most celebrated Civil War sites. Their Priority I status made them eligible for funds available from the ABPP and vastly improved their status as places for Civil War enthusiasts to visit. However, that is not the end of the story in Kentucky. The KHC is currently working with 18 other Civil War sites, and has provided grants to 14 of these sites since 1992. Of these 14 sites, nine have friends groups or organizations that successfully implement research, planning, acquisition, and interpretive projects.

A Growing Number of Friends

Kentucky boasts of several friends groups with records every bit as impressive as those in Perryville and Mill Springs. The Camp Nelson Preservation and Restoration Foundation (CNR&PF) works closely with the Jessamine County Fiscal Court (the county's governing body) to acquire grant funding and local matching funds for the camp's preservation. Camp Nelson was a heavily fortified Union quartermasters depot and a recruiting and training base for 10,000 African-American troops. The foundation has used grants from the county to develop a preservation and management plan, a driving tour of the site, and interpretive signage. The CNR&PF also created marketable items such as a brochure, a print, a video, and a calendar. With local and ISTE

Boy Scouts plant a seedling from the storm-felled Zollie Tree to replace the famous Mill Springs landmark. Photo courtesy KHC.





The Mill Springs Battlefield Association hosts the 135th Anniversary Commemoration Ceremony of the battle. Local officials, reenactors, and the general public attended the event.

grants and local fund raising, the foundation has netted more than \$1 million. They have a professional staff person, funded in part by a grant from the KHC, and are in the process of acquiring critical land necessary to preserve and interpret the site.

The Friends of Fort Hill in Frankfort is one of the newest Civil War non-profits in the state. Fort Hill overlooks the Kentucky River and the state capitol. These strategic heights contain two earthen fortifications, Fort Boone and the New Redoubt. Here, in 1864, Union troops and militia led by Governor Thomas Bramlette fought off a contingent of Confederate cavalry and kept the city from falling into Confederate hands a second time.

The Friends of Fort Hill work closely with the City of Frankfort. Fort Hill is a city park, but the surrounding land has been under development pressure for years. With a grant from the KHC, the Friends developed a community consensus-based plan for the forts. The Kentucky Historical Society will provide interpretation and support for the site thanks to a cooperative agreement between the non-profit Friends, the city, and the Historical Society. The city has obtained funding to create a pedestrian walk that will retrace the old military road up to the fort. The Friends' support helped this project overcome very vocal citizen opposition.

Near London, Kentucky, is the site of the Battle of Wildcat Mountain (October 1861), part of Brig. Gen. Felix Zollicoffer's Mill Springs campaign. The Camp Wildcat Preservation Foundation (CWPF) formed in 1994 to try to save the site of the first significant Civil War battle in Kentucky. The CWPF works closely with the USDA Forest Service, which owns part of the battlefield. The

CWPF recently applied for and received ISTEIA enhancement funds totaling \$145,000 to purchase critical battlefield lands. This money, coupled with funds from the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites and the timely intervention of a private benefactor saved this endangered site. The CWPF is currently working on a preservation and management plan for the battlefield.

The efforts of these groups demonstrate that the friends of Kentucky's Civil War sites are driven to protect their resources. They fuel the state's Civil War sites preservation effort. David L. Morgan, Executive Director of the KHC, states flatly, "Without the strong leadership and support of the friends groups in the state, our efforts to preserve Civil War battlefields and sites would not be nearly so successful. Strong grassroots support is essential to any preservation effort and these people have helped us push the envelope." No one knows a community better than the people who live there; consequently, no one is better equipped to make a preservation project succeed than local supporters.

To help the sites and friends groups, the KHC created the Kentucky Civil War Sites Association. This umbrella organization meets twice a year to share information and give site managers and friends an opportunity to share ideas. So far the effort has worked well, but much remains to be done.

Note

* While it is not essential for a friends group to have 501(c)(3) status to receive grants and other funding, it is very useful in the long run. This status allows donor gifts—such as money, services, equipment, museum objects, and books—to an organization to be tax deductible. Many people are more willing to give money if they can get a tax deduction. To get 501(c)(3) status, apply through the Internal Revenue Service. Request forms SS-4, 1023, 8718, and 872-C. Form SS-4 requests an organization's **Employer Identification Number**. This number is important for receiving public funding. Filling out these forms is daunting and complicated, and there is a fee that ranges from \$150-\$500 depending on an organization's status. Consult an attorney familiar with the income tax code to reduce strain and anxiety.

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